



Executive Summary

Capacity Development for Research: Strategic Evaluation

An Enduring Partnership:

Organizational Case Study of Université Cheikh Anta Diop

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Background

IDRC's Evaluation Unit (EU) is conducting a multi-phase strategic evaluation to investigate the Centre's contributions to the development of capacities of those with whom the Centre works. The evaluation aims to provide IDRC's own staff and managers with an intellectual framework and a useful common language to help harness the concept of capacity development and document the experiences and results the Centre has accumulated in this domain. Specifically, it focuses on the processes and results of IDRC support for the development of capacities of its southern partners: what capacities have been enhanced? Whose? How? How effectively?

Phase 4 of the strategic evaluation focuses on the elaboration of six organizational case studies intended to help the Centre better understand how it can best plan for, implement, and evaluate support for its partners' capacity development.

Research for Development Context

The Université Cheik Anta Diop (UCAD) is one of the oldest and most respected universities in West Africa whose origins go back to 1918. Today it has a large network of faculties, institutes, centres and schools. Its main teaching specialties are medicine, physical sciences, social sciences, literature and French, and renewable energy. UCAD's influence is felt well beyond the borders of Senegal, a fact that made it a natural partner in the region not only for IDRC but for universities in Europe, North America,



Cheikh Anta Diop University library building, showing additions, 2005

photo: Myriam Louvriot

Asia and the developing world that have signed cooperation agreements with UCAD. The University receives financing from international donors, the Senegalese government and the private sector.

Over the past several decades, research capacity at universities in Africa has been weakened by many factors. Most significant are the gradual withdrawal of the state from higher education, the uncritical readiness among academics to adopt methodologies and theories developed by non-Africans, the lack of exchange with academic circles in other countries, financial insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and financial and legal obstacles that impede access to information.

In Senegal as a whole, research is poorly organized. A ministry for scientific research was created five years ago, but it still has no research institutions under its tutelage. These institutions remain the responsibility of other ministries such as agriculture. One encouraging development is the creation of a fund to encourage research in priority sectors in Senegal, including health, education, agriculture, and biomedical and food sciences. A publication fund has also been established to aid in disseminating research results.

On the ground at UCAD, there is no provision in the budget for research, which means chronic shortages of resources for research, poor infrastructure, and inadequate or outdated equipment. The primary focus of the University is teaching rather than research. Enrolment has grown so much that lecture halls that used to hold about 300 students are now crammed with up to 1,000 students. Thus, teaching loads can be so great as to leave staff little time or energy for research.

Understandably, the many challenges facing researchers often lead to “brain drain,” whereby university staff is lured to overseas institutions by better salaries and

more favourable conditions for research. One woman who completed doctoral studies in health in France recounted her difficult personal deliberations when she returned to Senegal and was discouraged to find how poor the resources were at UCAD for pursuing her research interests. In the end, she did elect to stay in Senegal, because she felt she could make a greater contribution there. One UCAD professor described the dilemma thus: “You have to have very strong beliefs and a deep commitment to our country to stay when everything – the working conditions, a researcher’s salary, the lack of recognition for our work – pushes us toward positions elsewhere. I have turned down two offers in France, knowing that if I accepted, the chances were very good that I would never return.”

Against this generally negative backdrop, UCAD has taken some steps to improve the research environment. It set up a cooperation office that acts as an intermediary between foreign donors and UCAD researchers. This office provides donors a forum to coordinate their projects with UCAD and has the potential to harmonize initiatives in strengthening research capacity at the University. Salaries for teachers have also been increased at UCAD, which reduces the need for them to engage in external consulting and potentially frees up time for research. The University is also attempting to make its research work more pertinent and useful.

Expectations and capacity development strategies

IDRC has played three main roles in its relationship with UCAD – that of financial partner, technical advisor, and liaison agent with external partners. IDRC has become UCAD's most important partner in supporting research, with over \$8 million invested in projects since 1989. Although UCAD's pursuit of financing is at the heart of its relationship with IDRC, the deep understanding of Senegal and of UCAD researchers on the part of IDRC has solidified the partnership. It has allowed the Centre to work with the University to identify the major development issues facing the country and to find local solutions, an attitude that is appreciated within both UCAD and government circles.

Analysis of the twenty projects in the study sample shows that the intent to strengthen capacity is not implemented in a uniform way in all projects. The actual starting point for projects is a discussion between IDRC and UCAD about how to address a specific development issue, ranging from distance education to monitoring poverty to fighting tobacco use. Respondents from UCAD and the Senegalese government noted that although research funded by IDRC had to be aligned with Centre programs, this requirement had never constrained local research because IDRC takes steps to harmonize its programs with Senegalese priorities for national development. IDRC and UCAD worked together in three main program areas: social and economic policy, information and communication technologies for development, and environmental and natural resource management.

Once an approach has been settled upon for investigating a development issue, the objectives for capacity strengthening are built into the project design and eventually stipulated in the project document. According to an IDRC project manager at the West Africa Regional Office (WARO) in Dakar, projects have been required since the 1990s to deal in some way or another with the basic objective of strengthening research capacity. Reviewing the twenty projects in the sample, eight make a general reference to the objective of strengthening research capacity, five projects set out to strengthen the links between research and policy, and seven aim to create networks. UCAD and Senegalese government representatives report that among donors, IDRC is the one that emphasizes capacity building the most. Depending upon the project design, projects aim to strengthen capacity at one of three levels:

- one or more individual researchers;
- an organizational unit within UCAD; or
- UCAD's institutional context.

Major findings

According to UCAD respondents, IDRC's interventions in capacity building reflect good practices in contributing to capacity development. Among these good practices is:

- Perseverance – as demonstrated by IDRC's commitment to UCAD over two decades and its ability to adapt to changes happening within the University during that period.

- Flexibility and resilience – for example, the decision by IDRC to continue supporting the Applied Economic Research Centre (CREA) even when internal upheaval led to a change in leadership.
- Face-to-face communication, which creates both personal and organizational linkages.
- Mobilizing existing local capacities – instead of creating parallel systems. IDRC invests in the capacities of UCAD researchers rather than of teams composed of researchers mainly from the North.

Two other factors have contributed to IDRC's achievements in building capacity at UCAD. The physical proximity of WARO to the UCAD campus allowed for better establishment, implementation and supervision of projects. Communication between IDRC officers and UCAD researchers was a simple matter, even in face-to-face meetings, and difficulties or issues dealt with rapidly. The high level of interpersonal relations has been well appreciated in a local cultural context that values personal contact. IDRC's presence in Senegal also gave it a deeper knowledge of the country and contributed to better projects.

The other factor in the success of the projects under study was the local context in which they were implemented. For instance, the Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa (SISERA) and the Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic Policies' (MIMAP) program initiative benefitted from this type of context. Decision makers and donors were able to put the newly improved

capacities to immediate use for developing structural adjustment strategies or for monitoring poverty reduction strategies. However, other projects initially found less receptive hearings in the local policy making context. This was the case for the project on ICTs and governance.

Capacity of individuals

The major contribution of IDRC projects to capacity development has been to the capacities of individual researchers or research teams. These positive outcomes were achieved through a variety of methods. In some cases, specialized consultants, researchers or resource people were made available to the UCAD research team. For example, the project "Distance learning: information and communication technologies for basic education in Senegal" brought in ICT specialists from the University of Ottawa.

In many cases, training sessions were built into projects – such as a series of workshops to train researchers in the methodology used in the ecosystem approach to human health. The SISERA initiative provided the managers of all the organizations it supported with training in strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and resource mobilization. The MIMAP program initiative offered researchers training in approaches to evaluating the impacts of macroeconomic policies.

Seminars, conferences and workshops have been another training method, one that was part of the project "Seminar/workshop on tobacco control policy in Senegal." Support to networks that allow researchers to exchange knowledge, resources and tools has also

contributed to capacity development, notably in the case of SISERA. Its network of partner organizations received technical assistance, training, and support for infrastructure and for dissemination of research.

Researchers at UCAD have also benefited from grants for study abroad, a mechanism used by five individuals in the project “Institutionalisation of gender, rights and women’s citizenship in higher education at UCAD.” The project “ICT Resource Centres” covered the cost of UCAD professors who studied in France, and later provided for students to be trained in new ICT applications and research methods.

IDRC has often invested in equipment and infrastructure, for example in several ICT

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centres, was another mechanism used in UCAD projects to build capacity. For instance, researchers involved with SISERA were able to learn more about how to write

articles for publication, and how to present research products in ways that made them more accessible to a broad public.

The most obvious benefits to researchers at UCAD have been in acquiring knowledge, competencies, or expertise. In the ICT Resource Centres project, Senegalese professors gained much knowledge from their training and were able to replace foreign professors in a short time frame. Students trained through this project were able to carry out research on ICTs and apply it to development issues. Evaluations of training done through the SISERA and MIMAP initiatives show clear knowledge gains by participants in topics such as project management, resource mobilization, and macro-economic analysis methods for monitoring poverty.

Some UCAD researchers reported benefits in higher visibility and renown on the international scene that allowed them to disseminate their research results. For instance, a UCAD professor involved in the project on distance learning and ICTs submitted specialized articles on the subject to academic journals.

Several researchers at UCAD found that their collaboration with IDRC had allowed them to broaden their professional horizons by carrying out assignments for governments or development agencies. One researcher with CREA was engaged as an advisor to senior levels of the Senegalese government, while two others were contracted to analyze a local development issue for the World Bank.

Capacity strengthening through IDRC projects also led to greater opportunities for networking for UCAD researchers – with their colleagues in West Africa (in the case of SISERA, for example) and with counterparts at Canadian universities. Two UCAD researchers reported that their involvement with IDRC projects and their research results helped them secure financing from France for a subsequent phase of research.

But success in improving the capacity of researchers can come with a cost. It is estimated that about six in ten doctoral graduates at UCAD leave for posts outside the country. The brain drain is difficult for any one institution to counter, but it may lead IDRC to consider building into future projects ways to retain newly minted researchers.

Another obstacle to the sustainability of greater capacity is the difficulty of putting new knowledge into practice, owing to a lack of research equipment in laboratories or heavy teaching loads that leave little time for research.

Organizational Capacity

Beyond the level of individual capacities, some projects with UCAD had encouraging results in increasing capacity at the organizational level in various aspects of research for development. These projects shared certain features, including larger budgets (from \$250,000 to \$500,000), timeframes of several years, and a range of capacity building objectives that covered general capacity in research, strengthening the links between research and policy, and creating networks between researchers and other interested parties.

For instance, IDRC helped create the ICT Resource Centre within UCAD's Computer and Mathematics Department. Multiple strategies for capacity development were pursued, including an assessment of curricula, provision of equipment to improve teaching conditions, and creation of a laboratory. IDRC provided several students with grants to pursue studies in France. The result was that the ICT Resource Centre developed greater capacities for managing research, for communicating research results, and for making the research relevant to society. UCAD researchers and the Senegalese government agreed that the Resource Centre contributed to creating a policy environment that was favourable to the role of ICTs in helping solve development problems.

The case of SISERA is regarded as the most thorough instance of IDRC strengthening the capacities of a unit within UCAD. Through SISERA, IDRC provided CREA financial and technical support that allowed it to participate in significant ways in establishing policies of structural adjustment in the region. CREA researchers improved their capacities to carry out research, to manage research projects, to disseminate their research results throughout the region via networks, and to exercise influence through their research. Although the current capacity of CREA is less vigorous than it had been, this situation is owing to management difficulties that occurred within CREA and that led the research team trained through IDRC support to break away to form the Economic and Social Research Consortium (CRES). The consortium is still associated

with UCAD, but on different terms. CRES is a dynamic research group recognized and consulted by national decision-makers.

Institutional Capacity

In recent years, some of IDRC's capacity development efforts have aimed to create a stronger link between supply and demand in research. The goal has been to stimulate research that is more influential and useful to decision-makers. Some progress has been made in this respect, notably the role assumed by CREA in undertaking economic research commissioned by the state or by multilateral agencies. Although the emergence of a national culture favorable to Senegalese research goes well beyond IDRC's mandate and mission, WARO is contributing by acting as interlocutor between the UCAD research community and various government departments and agencies, organizing seminars and conferences on pertinent policy issues, and supporting publications such as CREA's research syntheses that present research results in capsule format.

Strengths and Shortcomings

The case study revealed what UCAD researchers consider to be the greatest strengths of IDRC in its relations with the University. The most important is the credibility of IDRC in the eyes of UCAD and of others involved in research in Senegal. This credibility reflects the quality of IDRC's interventions and the atmosphere of mutual respect between the Centre and UCAD, IDRC's long-term approach that is able to weather crises, difficulties and failures, and IDRC's willingness to act as an intermediary with no other

agenda than advancing solutions to development problems through research.

A practical strength of IDRC is its simple and rapid process for project approval without any useless bureaucracy, a process that compares favourably with those of other UCAD research partners.

UCAD researchers also appreciate the quality of communication they have with IDRC project managers at various stages in the project cycle. They even said that the verbal or written exchanges were in and of themselves a form of capacity development for researchers. IDRC project managers were praised for listening to suggestions and for providing feedback, all with a view to producing a high-quality project. Some women researchers at UCAD appreciated the awareness of IDRC managers of gender equality in projects and their approach devoid of sexism.

The case study also brought to light certain shortcomings on the part of IDRC in capacity development. One of these was in the area of project evaluations: few researchers knew whether their project had been evaluated or what recommendations had emerged. Obviously, it would be useful at the end of a project to have an in-depth discussion of evaluation results in order to extract lessons that can be applied in future endeavours.

It also became clear from this study that the knowledge and understanding on the part of UCAD researchers and senior management about IDRC's objectives in strengthening organizational capacity for research were quite uneven. It would be worthwhile to discuss these objectives in a more concerted fashion.

Looking ahead

The case study also pointed to other areas of capacity development that UCAD researchers would like IDRC to pursue. These include better training for researchers in project management skills, and study grants to Senegalese researchers to master English and thereby overcome a language barrier between themselves and much of the research world. The researchers would also appreciate efforts by IDRC to inculcate a culture of research at UCAD by funding study at universities where teaching methods allow more innovation and experimentation.

Since the sustainability of IDRC's interventions in capacity building will ultimately depend upon improved capacity within UCAD's departments and centres, respondents suggested further attention from IDRC in this area. One initiative would be to examine the type of organization being targeted for capacity building – be it a university, a network, a government, or a research centre – and determine whether

the capacity building approach is adequate and appropriate. Other suggestions are to balance a focus on financing distinct projects against more global support to organizational infrastructure and management skills, to pay closer attention to organizational units that are experiencing periods of leadership transition and staff turnover, and to stretch out support over longer periods to allow for the modest absorptive capacity of some organizations and to set a more realistic implementation schedule.

In the arena of institutional capacity building, study respondents recommend that IDRC continue its efforts to promote dialogue between the producers of research and those who might use it in government and the private sector. Such efforts require balancing a number of goals and tensions, including the emergence of a national culture favourable to Senegalese research, maintaining the autonomy of the research community, and producing research that is relevant to local needs.

Methodology

Marie-Hélène Adrien and Martin Carrier of Universal Management Group carried out the case study. IDRC approved a detailed methodology, developed by the study team. The study included a sample of 20 IDRC-supported projects at UCAD, all of which had commenced between 1995 and 2006. The projects came from different sectors and represented a variety of approaches to capacity strengthening and a range of budgets – from a few thousand dollars to several hundred thousand dollars. Main methods of data collection were document and file review, interviews, and site visits. Validity of data was ensured through data triangulation (using a convergence of multiple data sources).

The evaluation team pursued several complementary methodological approaches. It read the available literature on African universities and their research capacity as well as documentation relating to UCAD, documents and reports on the projects included in the study sample, and general literature on strengthening organizational capacity. Much of the research was devoted to interviews carried out at IDRC headquarters and at the West Africa Regional Office in Dakar. The interviews allowed the evaluators to understand the perspectives of the project leaders, managers, professors and research staff at UCAD. The evaluators also engaged with government and civil society partners of IDRC and UCAD in Senegal.